

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
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AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 02178

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS SHUM IR
SUBJ: TABRIZ RIOTS: GOI PERSONNEL CHANGES AND SOME
ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

REF: A. TEHRAN 2085, B. TABRIZ 0020

SUMMARY: AZMOUDEH OUT AS EAST AZARBAIJAN PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR;
EX-PROVINCIAL POLICE CHIEF BRIGADIER GEN. HOUSHMAND REAPPOINTED
POLICE COMMANDER IN PROVINCE. REVIEW OF RIOT ACTIVITIES
INDICATES DISTINCTLY GREATER ANTI-GOI ACTIVITY AT TABRIZ THAN
IN PREVIOUS RELIGIOUS DEMONSTRATIONS. THOUGH RELIGIOUS
LEADERS DEPLORE VIOLENCE, RUMORS CONTINUE TO ABOUND. ROUNDUP
OF SUSPECTED RIOT LEADERS CONTINUING, BUT 110 NOW OUT ON BAIL
AFTER QUESTIONING. OPPOSITIONISTS STILL UNSURE HOW TO
PLAY TABRIZ EVENTS. END SUMMARY.
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1. MORNING PRESS MARCH 2 ANNOUNCED EAST AZARBAIJAN
PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR ESKANDAR AZMOUDEH WOULD NOT BE RETURNING
TO HIS JOB AFTER HIS MEETING WITH GOI OFFICIALS IN
TEHRAN. THIS IS FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF REFTELS THAT
LARGE-SCALE CHANGES ARE IN ORDER FOR TABRIZ. (NOTE:
REF B INCORRECTLY ANNOUNCED TABRIZ MAYOR HAD BEEN SACKED.

HE REMAINS IN OFFICE FOR NOW. ERROR WAS DUE TO MIXUP IN LOCANEWSROOM.) PRESS ALSO ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT OF BRIGADIER GEN. HOUSHMAND AS NEW EAST AZARBAIJAN CHIEF OF POLICE; HE WAS FORMERLY IN SAME POSITION AND IS ONE OF BEST IRANIAN NATIONAL POLICE OFFICERS AT HIS GRADE, ACCORDING TO TEHRAN POLICE SOURCE.

2. REVIEW OF RIOT ACTIVITIES FROM TEN DAYS' PERSPECTIVE AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUGGESTS TABRIZ EVENTS HAD DISTICTLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT CAST. COMMERCIAL SURCES TOLD ECONOFF THAT BANK OMRAN BRANCHES PARTICULARLY HARD HIT--THIS BANK IS KNOWN AS MAIN RESPOSITORY OF PAHLAVI FOUNDATION FUNDS--AND FOR FIRST TIME IN RELIGIOUSLY-ORIENTED DEMONSTRATION, LEAFLETS, DIRECTLY ATTACKING SHAH WERE PASSED OUT. SHOPS WHICH WERE HIT, IN ADDITION TO THOSE CITED EARLIER, INCLUDED THOSE OPEN IN DEFIANCE OF CLOSE ORDER GIVEN BY AYATOLLAH SHARIATMADARI OF QOM, AND THOSE WITH SHAH/SHABANOU, OR OTHER ROYAL FAMILY REFERENCE IN THEIR NAMES. ATTACKS ON MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS PARTICULARLY VICIOUS. RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE THAT MAIN CAUSE OF RIOT WAS CLOSURE OF MOSQUES BY PROVINCE GOVERNOR DESPITE TEHRAN "SUGGESTION" THAT THIS NOT BE DONE, AND FURTHER STORY STILL MAKING ROUNDS THAT POLICE CHIEF OF 6TH DISTRICT (WHO WAS RELIEVED) STARTED MOB ON ITS WAY BY SHOOTING EITHER AN OLD MAN OR A STUDENT (TAKE YOUR CHOICE) DEAD ON THE STREET. (EMBASSY COMMENT: UPDATED CONFIDENTIAL

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INFO CONFIRMS CLOSING OF MANY MOSQUES, BUT STORY ON POLICE CHIEF REMAINS IN THE RUMOR CORRAL AS UNLIKELY.)

3. PRESS REPORTS ADDITIONAL 13 PERSONS ARRESTED MARCH 1 (NO NAMES GIVEN), INCLUDING SOME PROMINENT TABRIZ MERCHANTS (PRESUMABLY BAZAAREES). PUBLIC PROSECUTOR IN TABRIZ HAD ANNOUNCED THAT 100 INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN RELEASED ON BAIL OUT OF TOTAL 627 ARRESTED. JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS REMAIN IN HANDS OF MINISTRY OF JUSTICE; TO EMBASSY'S KNOWLEDGE NO ONE YET HAS BEEN HANDED OVER TO MILITARY COURT SYSTEM.

4. EMBASSY SOURCE WITH GOOD RELIGIOUS OPPOSITIONIST CONTACTS IN TEHRAN REPORTS THIS GROUP WAS DISMAYED ABOUT TABRIZ VIOLENCE, UNSURE WHETHER AND HOW DEEPLY THEIR OWN PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED AND SUSPICIOUS OF WHETHER OTHERS MAY HAVE INFILTRATED MOB AND TURNED IT VIOLENT. FACT THAT MOB STRUCK IN TWO WAVES AND THAT AT LEAST ONE BANK (IRANO-BIRITSH) WAS HIT AT 7 A.M. , WELL BEFORE RIOTING STARTED, HAS SUGGESTED TO SOME OPPOSITIONISTS THAT THEY WERE USED BY OTHERS, BUT NONE ARE YET WILLING TO SAY WHO "OTHERS" MIGHT BE.

5. EMBASSY COMMENT: BOTH GOI AND ITS CRITICS ARE CLEARLY REASSESSING TABRIZ EVENTS IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN LONGER TERM STRATEGIES, AND NEITHER APPEARS HAPPY ABOUT TURN OF EVENTS. ASIDE FROM PRIVATE COMMENTS, EVERYONE SEEMS TO BE WAITING FOR PROMISED GOI INVESTIGATION REPORT ON TABRIZ EVENTS BEFORE BRINGING FORTH FULLER ANALYSIS. UNLESS ADDITIONAL INFO MARKEDLY CHANGES SITUATION OR PERCEPTIONS OF SAME, EMBASSY WILL DO THE SAME.

6. CONSULATE TABRIZ AIRGRAM A-05 BEING POUCHED MARCH 3 GIVES UPDATE ON MANY DETAILS AND CONSULATE'S INTERIM VIEW OF EVENTS.
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